

Envoy in Clash With House Unit on Pacification

By RICHARD DUDMAN

A Washington Correspondent
Of the Post-Dispatch

WASHINGTON, Oct. 4 — A dispute between Ambassador Robert W. Komer, United States pacification director in South Vietnam, and members of the House foreign operations subcommittee came to light today.

Komer, a former St. Louisan whom friends and critics alike sometimes call "the blowtorch" because of his direct speech and action, took offense at House members' observation that the pacification program was "lagging and floundering."

Chairman John E. Moss of the House committee told Komer that his letter was offensive and that a note Komer had sent to another committee member, Representative Ogden R. Reid (Rep.), New York, was insulting.

Moss, a California Democrat, forwarded the correspondence to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, saying, "I thought these letters might be of some interest to you."

Moss and Reid said they considered the correspondence with Komer personal and unofficial and would not make any direct comment.

Calls Time Too Short

Moss said he had not evaluated Komer's performance in Saigon. He said Komer's five months there were not enough basis for a judgment as to his competence in directing what now is called the program of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support.

"If I had considered this an official exchange, I would have made it public," Moss said. "If I wanted to get anybody, I would start in and go after him."

The Post-Dispatch obtained copies of the letters from a non-congressional source.

Moss and Reid had written to Rusk in August, transmitting three subcommittee reports, on "Illicit practices affecting the U.S. economic program in Vietnam," "The port situation in Vietnam" and "The commercial (commodity) import program for Vietnam."

In that letter, the Representatives said they were "deeply concerned about the lack of meaningful progress and reform in the lagging and floundering pacification program." They referred specifically to revolutionary development and land reform.

Limited Inquiry

Komer wrote to Moss Aug. 29 that he was nonplused at the comment, "since the subcommittee and staff were able to undertake only a very limited investigation of pacification because of their many other inquiries during their recent brief visit to Vietnam."

"It is only fair to say that you and the staff did not express such vigorous reservations about the pacification to us out here during your stay," Komer wrote.

He told Moss that Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Gen. William C. Westmoreland and himself were "all increasingly pleased with the slowly growing momentum in pacification." Conceding some flaws, he said the program in 1967 was far superior to 1966, when it got under way.

In a short note to Reid, Komer wrote: "It is really quite hard on us out here who are trying to do a job which needs doing to get whacked about 'lagging and floundering.' You didn't come along on the last trip, but I can assure you that in their all too brief time in Vietnam the chairman and staff had mighty little time available to spend on pacification, and heard little to warrant such a slam. What happened?"

Moss replied that Komer's letter to him was offensive and that the note to Reid was insulting.

Lack of Understanding

"Both of these communications reveal a lack of understanding of the role of a congressional investigating committee," Moss said.

He took "strong and vigorous exception" to the statement that he and the staff did not express vigorous reservations to Komer when they were in Vietnam. He said he and the staff had detailed discussions of pacification with many officials.

"Mr. Ambassador, throughout all my meetings I expressed my strong objections to the recent changes as well as my grave concern for the lack of meaningful progress in this area," Moss wrote.

"Though you cite the fact of elections in 1037 villages and 4616 hamlets as indication of progress, may I remind you there are over 2500 villages and 12,500 hamlets in South Vietnam."

He said he had consistently questioned the need for creating the CORDS organization, because its predecessor, the Office of Civil Operations, seemed to be making progress.

"I have stated my views in unequivocal terms that U.S. representatives and officials in Vietnam should take a firmer stand in order to convince the government of Vietnam that they must vigorously press for necessary social and economic reforms and that the cooperation of that government is essential if the confidence of the people of the United States in U.S. involvement in Vietnam is to be retained."

Moss wrote that he was not

charging total lack of progress. He noted that Komer had reported that additional cadre teams in the field meant a favorable trend.

"If I am hesitant to accept this statement as being factually accurate, it is understandable, since the program through the years has been constantly changed and new and glowing promises predicted for its success. The progress I look for should be on a more broadly based record than can be presently substantiated."

Reid told the Post-Dispatch that he did not believe in commenting on U.S. officials serving overseas, because he had been an ambassador himself.

He said his real concern was that South Vietnam was not doing enough and had made no major commitment to real re-

form. He said U.S. officials, instead of pressing the Vietnamese government to do

more, were concerned about "not rocking the boat."